Feminist Translation: Translator's Subjectivity, Strategies and Influences

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Abstract: Feminist translation theory is the academic fruit of the further development of feminist movement and also the portrayal of women's reflection fueled by feminism. Based on Skopos theory, the paper explores how translator's subjectivity acts in translation activities from the feminist perspective, aiming to reveal the relationship between feminist translation and translator's subjectivity. On the basis of a brief introduction, description and evaluation of major feminist translation theories, this study will analyze and evaluate different feminist translation strategies, and conduct critical research of translator's subjectivity, focusing on how feminist translation theory traveled on Chinese soil and the influence of translator's subjectivity combined with Chinese feminist translation.
Keywords: feminist translation, Skopos theory, translator's subjectivity

1. Introduction

Feminist translation theory is a reflection and a further developing of the feminist movement. This movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s focused on two aspects: firstly, increasing the women's rights as well as minimizing the stereotypes of women; then, emphasizing more on the commonality, and shared experiences of woman (von Flotow 1991: 6). Followed by post-war feminism, the late 20th century marked a new period that translation studies moved from a purely linguistic discipline to other areas. Such a crossover was a product of the cultural turn in translation studies and rising post-modernist theories, i.e. feminism.

"The cultural turn" is taken up by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere from Mary Snell-Hornby in *Translation, History and Culture* to redefine translation theory, which is not only a matter of linguistics but also of culture, including context, history, and convention (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990). Besides, the cultural turn "prepared terrain for a fruitful encounter with feminist thought" (Simon 1996: 8). Cultural studies, including feminist translation theories, greatly influence translation studies to go beyond language and to make culture its focus. As a part of post-modernism, "feminism allows translation to be viewed as a form of rewriting within a specific historical, social, and cultural context, a rewriting that always implicates the translator's subjectivity" (Yu 2015: 1), from which visible translator's identity, female's participants in particular, is noticed by more and more feminist translators.

In this article, I am going to discuss translator's subjectivity based on Skopos theory, exploring in what ways it can be seen in different feminist translation strategies and analyzing how it influences Chinese feminist translation studies. The motivation arises from my gender identity, gender awareness, and the fact that Chinese feminist translation theory is still in an early age, greatly encourages me to do this project, attracting more domestic attention on feminism and making contribution to Chinese feminist translation studies. Followed by a brief introduction, a description and an evaluation of main feminist translation theory, I will take a critical review of translator's subjectivity based on Skopos theory. This will then be done by analyzing, exploring, and evaluating different feminist translation strategies. Next, I will focus on the influence of translator's subjectivity in Chinese feminist translation. Lastly, the developments of feminist translation theory in China will be examined.

2. Feminist translation theory

Central to feminist theory is a "parallel between the status of translation" (Munday 2008: 131), which is seemed to be defective to the ST, and that of women, "so often and impressed in society and literature" (Munday 2008: 131). In cultural studies, the main focus is about translation in a certain culture, including ideology, history, and social background. Based on this, we can conclude that translation in cultural studies and feminist studies do have similarity: interdisciplinarity (culture versus translation; feminism versus translation) — the cultural turn creates a new dimension that translation studies interact with other disciplines (Simon 1996).

Historically, translator and woman have been in a weaker position as translator is "handmaiden to author, woman

inferior to man" (Simon 1996: 1). Early in the mid-16th century, John Florio summarized a double inferiority between translation and woman: as a reproduction, translation is inevitably defective and it is usually linked with females (Simon 1996: 1). As described by Sherry Simon (1996) and Lori Chamberlain (1992), source text has a hierarchical authority over the target text, which echoes with feminine images in a male-dominated and patriarchal society.

2.1 Les belles infidèles

A quite popular metaphor between source text and target text is "les belles infidèles". Claimed by a French rhetorician Menage (Simon 1996), like females, translations are either beautiful or faithful. This analogy involves two main issues regarding to the social gender: fidelity and sexism. The fidelity is a traditional problem in terms of previous translation studies but it only focused on the "old binary concept of translation", "which saw original and translated text as two poles" (Bassnett 1992: 66). According to Sherry Simon (1996), a reconstruction of polarity should be made to against absolute binary opposition model. Translation (translator) and its original text (author) are in a continuum as well as men and women relationship. Based on that, translation does not destroy the meaning of the source text but extend its "afterlife". "Les belles infidèles" is also discussed by Lori Chamberlain (1992), that the loyalty of marriage shares a common feature with the fidelity of translation. It implies an invisible contract between source text (husband, father, or author) and target text (women). However, there is a "double standard" in a traditional marriage: wife will be on a public trial for disloyalty while unfaithful husband will have no punishments at all. Chamberlain (1992) further explains the gender discrimination behind the metaphor (les belles infidèles) that "beauty" is linked with "unfaithfulness".

However, in my opinion, some sexist languages they discuss in translation studies are actual meta-languages, that is, languages to describe translation phenomena other than translation itself. To be specific, they did not deal with matters inside translation but cultural studies. Therefore, it is possible that the emergence of feminist translation theory is more like a political act to reveal gender discrimination in translation. It "emphasizes the overt visibility of the translator as an agent creatively negotiates between source and target language" (Pas and Zaborowska 2017: 139), which reinforces the translator's subjectivity.

2.2 Translator's subjectivity

Feminist translation theory opens a new door for translation studies from a gender perspective, requiring female translator to be in a dominant position, which differs from traditional translation studies. Based on Skopos theory, this part is going to explain why translator's identity is changing from invisible to visible.

"Female writing and translation meet in their common desire to foreground female subjectivity in the production of meaning" (Simon 1996: 13). Highly-interventionist involvements on gender issues in the source text by feminist translator may appear to affirm her subjectivity. In response to gender consciousness, they re-read and rewrite the source text to balance "gender neutrality" (Nida 1995).

Interestingly, Skopos theory can be a strong theoretical support to explain rising female subjectivity and feminist translation aim. According to Skopos theory, translation is an intentional activity to transfer the target-text function (Nord 1997). Skopos, "derives from Greek, as the technical term for the purpose of a translation", which is used by Vermeer to summarize the Skopos rule: the overall translation aim determines production of the target text (Schäffner 1997). In this case, ST-TT equivalence may no longer be in a top priority in the process of translating. Apart from the Skopos rule, translation Skopos is also explained by coherence rule and fidelity rule. The coherence rule focuses on the understandings of target readers while fidelity rule "concerns intertextual coherence between translatum and source text" (Schäffner 1997: 236). In feminist translation, a rising translator's subjectivity is intertwined with its translation Skopos as two aspects. The first main aim of feminist translation is to newly define the relationship between source text and target text, remarkably challenges fidelity and equivalence in traditional translation studies. In most cases, translation is in a weaker position, as females in a patriarchal society. By using visible manipulations over styles, word choices, feminist translator believes that translation is not only a source text-based creative artifact, but it is made to reflect societies and cultures (Simon 1996). The remedies that were applied to translation studies from a feminist perspective, stressing the importance of translation and highlighting translator's subjectivity. Second, feminist translation is regarded as an action-based theory to achieve political visibility. In other words, they claimed that in the process of translation, various strategies should be used to strengthen the subjectivity of female translator, making women's voices visible in the target text (von Flotow 1997). Their aim is to break stereotypes in patriarchal languages and to open up a new angle for female discourse (von Flotow 1997). In short, translator's subjectivity from invisible to more curtain-lifting provided feminist translators with a potential way to reach their goals.

However, followed by its particular purposes, feminist translation overemphasizes the manipulations and interventions over the target text to perceive translator's subjectivity, which might distort the nature of both translation studies and

feminism. A starting point of criticism from outside feminisms is linguistic intervention. To be specific, feminist translator insists that grammatical gender should be changed if the source text conveys any sexist elements. For example, "Shey, shem, sheir" are used to replace "he/she, him/her, his/hers" (Baron 1986). Feminist innovative practices here do not fundamentally eliminate the sexist discrimination but do challenge conventionally-accepted linguistic norms. Because gender marker is a matter of linguistics not translation, overstressing the female's subjectivity may cause some unnecessary misunderstandings in our actual communications in an English-speaking environment. Next, concerning criticism from within feminisms, according to Rosemary Arrojo, "it is opportunistic to claim to be faithful to the tenor of a text, as Suzanne Levine does, and yet admit to deliberately intervening in the translation for feminist reasons" (von Flotow 1997). Then, a "double standard", the tendency to use violent and aggressive feminist application in the target text, is found in feminist translation (von Flotow 1997). However feminist translation does not mean to reconstruct a female-dominant context but to provide a new way of translating gender issues. Lastly, feminist translator chooses the theory which can help them to reach their political aims into a particular area, which is theoretically incoherent in some cases (von Flotow 1997). It is therefore concluded that corrective measures used by feminist translators to reinforce subjectivity probably bias the way of understanding feminisms.

2.3 Feminist approaches to translation: based on female subjectivity

Based on translation Skopos, feminist translator tries to use novel strategies to translate or even to rewrite the source text to highlight the gender discrimination. Being responsible for a dual task of eliminating discrimination against translator and women, they summarize more than one interesting strategy to emphasize the active participation of female translators in translation studies, three of the most important are named by von Flotow (1991): supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking.

Supplementing, "which compensates for the differences between languages, calls for interventionist moves by the translator" (von Flotow 1991: 14). The translator can add something they think necessary to their translation. For example, in Bible, translators add "sisters" after "brothers". It is a creative rewriting from a feminist perspective, which shows female translator's conscious intervention towards the source text. One major criticism of this approach is that supplementing sometimes may cause non-equivalent ST-TT language pairs. Because translators are based on a feminist standpoint, they might add some words irrelevant to the source text.

Then prefacing and footnoting, as a frequently used strategy in terms of feminist translation, refers to explanations of the backgrounds and intentions of the source text, greatly showing their desire of increasing attention on women's social status. The third one "hijacking", as is debated by many scholars (Simon 1996; Yu 2015), is a process by which feminist translators correct the sexist language in the source text on the basis of subjective intentions or preferences (Simon 1996:15). Von Flotow discusses it in detail by giving an example of Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood's translation. Not surprisingly, de Lotbiniere-Harwood regulates masculine expressions in the source text, "avoiding male generic terms where they appear in French" (Simon 1996: 15). This translation technique proves that translation is a political practice to make the target text "speak for women", feminine visible in language (Gauvin 1989: 9). Have been compared supplementing with hijacking, I found that there is some overlap between them. They are both visible interventions made by translators to render the target text in their feminist perceptions.

However, Massardier-Kenny, she questioned von Flotow's three translating approaches in her essay "Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice" (Massardier-Kenny 1997). She argued that von Flotow's classification, except hijacking, can apply to a daily routine in translation instead of feminist translation only. Firstly, it is noticeable that there is a similarity between the concept of supplementing and traditional translating method, namely compensation (Massardier-Kenny 1997). Secondly, prefacing and footnoting, are generally used to describe background information of the source text and intentions of the target text. In order to feminize the target text, Massardier-Kenny categoried two strategies: author-centred and translator-centred. The former one includes recovery, commentary, making the reader understand the target text while the latter focuses on the use of parallel texts to create a similar situation in a target culture, bringing the translation closer to the target reader (Massardier-Kenny 1997: 59). Massardier-Kenny went further than von Flotow to connect author (source text) with translator (target text). She suggested that translators should work with one or more colleague on a given text instead of facing the difficulty of translation alone. However, there are no big differences between hijacking and translator-centred translating strategies, for that they all include interventions over the target text. Still, because of its strong subjectivity, the target text is mainly based on the manipulation of translators. As feminist translation corrects potential sexist words, the target text will lose its original expression.

Maier's classification, in some ways, supports von Flotow and Massardier-Kenny's discussions of feminist translation approaches. Her first approach, no deliberate approach, "a null strategy or literal translation" (Maier 1998: 98), echoes Massardier-Kenny's attitude towards feminism in translation studies, i.e. "it is the feminist use of the strategies that makes

the strategies feminist" (Yu 2015: 14). Encouraged by Massardier-Kenny's translator-centred strategy, Maier named another two approaches: women-identified and women-interrogated approaches. Interestingly, these two techniques positively respond to the translator-centred approach. I noticed that these three strategies all make female as a main focus, especially in the women-identified approach, "translators identify themselves as women" (Maier 1998: 100).

To sum up, von Flotow's (1991) supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking, Massardier-Kenny's (1997) author-centred and translator-centred strategies, Maier's (1998) women-identified and women-interrogated approaches, are mostly useful tools to help feminist translators explain their purposes or rewritings, but carry strong female subjectivity.

2.4 Feminist translation in China

In general, Chinese feminism discourse witnessed three main stages: "the late Qing and early Kuomintang Republican years, the first three decades of the People's Republic of China, and the years following Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening-up" (Li 2017). As influenced by Chinese deep-rooted traditional ideology of male chauvinism, feminist translation theory did not gain its popularity in China before modern times (Yu 2015). After entering the modern period, women voices were noticed by a small group of feminist advocators. Feminist movement, as a political legacy of the May 4th Movement in China, allowed women to play increasing supportive and important roles in society (Liu 2017). Then in 1999, "Xie Tianzhen's Medio-Translatology was the first to introduce Western feminist translation studies in China" (Li 2017). Reaching the peak in 2013, feminist translation was staring to become a burgeoning research area in China (Li 2017).

Visible female interventions over the target text in the Western feminist translation enlightened Chinese feminist translators on sexist issues in literature. Driven by an increasing discussion on feminism, feminist translation theory was developed with great Chinese characteristics. There was a big debate on conceptual Chinese translation of the concept "feminism", being translated as "女性主义" or "女权主义" (Xu 2009: 203). The differences mostly lie in the explanation of two Chinese characters："性" and "权"."性" aims to seize increasing public attention on women and elimination of some sexist descriptions in translation while "权" calls on more political involvements and employment opportunities for women. Also, the dilemma is resulted by its political, feminist demands and desires. Because feminist translation theory was labeled as an educated tool in revolutionary China (Xu 2009). Therefore, two translations of "feminism" in contemporary China reflected the future trend of Chinese feminist translation, either focus on breaking male-centred society or raising woman's political position (Lin 1997).

Clearly, the journey of feminist translation on Chinese soil was not continually successful. Unlike in the West, China maintained a feudal system for thousands of years (Stavrianos 1998). Western feminist translation theory does not follow the developments in Chinese history, making it difficult to be localized in China. First, Western feminism, as a product of political movement, advocates the woman's liberation, equality. The different thing in China was that feminism was not as radical as in the West due to Confucian-dominated concepts. Therefore, Chinese feminist translation is more like a guide for Chinese feminist translator to reconsider sexist elements during translation. Then, Chinese is a language without grammatical gender (masculine, feminine in French) or sexist word spellings ("human" in English). For example, "homme" in French means "human" or "man", however in Chinese, "human" (人) and "man" (男人) are two different characters. "人" only refers to "human", but includes both connotations of "man" and "woman" (女人). Thus, it is impossible for Chinese feminist translator to consider linguistic rearrangements or interventions. In brief, Western feminist translation theory provides China with a new feminist perspective to transfer the source text, which might benefit future translation studies.

3. Conclusion

Feminist translation theory is a positive attempt and is far-reaching for the consideration of woman's social status and of marginalized group. One remarkable legacy is to create a new angle to discuss translation studies. Importantly, Skopos theory provides the paper with an analytical framework to explain why translator's subjectivity is strengthened in the practices of feminist translation. However, overstressing translator's subjectivity sometimes may cause many problems, both inside and outside feminisms. Influenced by increasingly important subjectivity, there are several approaches, summarized by different feminist scholars, namely Luise von Flotow, Françoise Massardier-Kenny, and Carol Maier, to help translators to deal with feminist texts. Despite of its high achievements in China, feminist translation theory was given birth on the Western soil, it has turn out to be something unsuitable in Mainland China. To make it effective in China, it is suggested to combine Western feminist translation theory with Chinese socio-cultural conditions to see if feminist translation can be reached on an expected level.

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